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# THE SCHOOL REVIEW

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## THE DECALOGUE OF THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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The standard junior high school is yet to be born. It is nowhere in existence. All over this country there have been spasmodic efforts launched. They aim to break the chains of the past traditions. The successes have varied from zero to a few radical changes. But when these reforms are carefully examined, the departures from the former standard seventh and eighth grades are found to exist more in theory and on paper than in practice.

Let us believe and hope that when the standard junior high school arrives it will be a marked departure from the old system. Yes, a definite departure in many ways. The imminent danger consists in making ourselves believe that we have instituted reforms when we have not. Such would be a calamity to this national movement. Many junior high schools today consist only in the fact that the seventh and eighth grades have been moved to some building and given a name. Others have undertaken various modifications. In many cases they have been filled with teachers so set in their ways that it is impossible for them to carry out any new thing.

Long has this nation waited for some desirable reforms—reforms in government, reforms in religion, reforms in colleges, reforms in our petrified courses of study—but especially reforms in our conception of the intellectual life and conduct of adolescent boys and girls. This war has loosened the chains of tradition. It has demonstrated the possibility of almost any reform movement. It has suggested the necessity of a great reconstruction in education. No country on earth ever had such an opportunity for educational improvement as now exists in America. The nation that does not have an educational revival after a great war is hopeless. It was the genius and enthusiasm of Fichte that turned the German people to education after the Napoleonic wars. Had they been faithful to his ideas of an education for peace and internal improvement, this world war would never have occurred.

The junior high school which we are about to describe some will pronounce educational chaos. Others may admit its idealistic nature, but declare it impossible of realization. The past two years prove that scarcely anything is impossible if the American people can be brought to feel its necessity. The word “impossible” should have a very small place in the vocabulary of achievement. In the office of one of the leading firms of this country I once saw this sign: “The darned fool did not know it was impossible; so he went ahead and did it.”

In presenting what we hope the future will bring forth we do not in any wise mean to condemn the worthy efforts now being made by the superintendents of this country. We realize that it is wise to evolve just as fast as the people will stand for it. But to have no ideal end toward which we are evolving is blind chaos, not conscious evolution. When we are once sure that some definite, comprehensive goal or future destiny guides the efforts of our school authorities, we can fairly well trust the outcome. Blind, spasmodic effort, the

innumerable wild panaceas, the efforts to camouflage the old, to make a show, to deceive others and ourselves—these are the enemies of reconstruction in education.

Here are a few demands to which the future junior high school can, should, and we hope will conform.

1. *Under wise guidance there shall be almost unlimited freedom in the choice of subjects.*—It is now sixty years since Spencer entered a plea for individual freedom in the choice of subject-matter in education. He gave then the arguments that have been elaborated since. A few years later President Eliot of Harvard advocated the same principles and set the practical example for this country.

Some twelve years ago the writer was appointed by the Educational Council of the Colorado Teachers' Association to investigate the elective system in American education. We found that the system had a footing in nearly all colleges and in nearly all high schools in the middle and western states. By some we were told then that the reaction was setting in, and from time to time we have heard this same cry. Yet each year conditions and the good fruits of individual freedom compelled more freedom. There can be no reaction to a movement founded on such biological, economic, and psychological principles. The past two years produced more changes in favor of individual freedom than any previous ten years.

One of the chief motives behind the junior-high-school movement has been greater adaptability to the individual needs and individual differences in the child of twelve to fourteen. It was urged as a necessary means for keeping boys and girls of the seventh and eighth grades in school.

It is true that a program of minor electives is in most cases provided for on paper. But what happens? More than one hundred and fifty junior-high-school teachers and those preparing to teach or supervise such work were asked to make a

definite list of the time that should be required in the standard subjects now taught in the seventh and eighth grades and the first year of the high school. This would cover both the two and the three-year plans. When this material had been digested, to my amazement I found that there would only be an average possibility of five hours per week elective work. However, there existed almost unanimous opinion as to the advisability of this freedom of choice, until it became necessary to translate theory into actual practice. Then the old traditional schedule was almost completely asserted.

Is there any one subject that should be made uniformly obligatory as a condition of remaining in school or as a condition of final completion of the course? I do not believe there is—not even arithmetic. Our commandment No. 1 carries with it a clause—"under wise guidance." By means of wise guidance you can usually get children to do what is actually best for them without open compulsion. But it should not mean that anyone shall make up his mind indirectly to foist on all children any one study without due regard to special talents or individual variations. We are not theorizing. The system has been tried. If only space permitted, we could give scores of cases of successful operation. If we do not grant this freedom, the junior high school will fail to solve the problems it was launched to solve.

2. *Any student shall be freely promoted in any single subject or to any grade at any time he is able to accomplish the work of that study or grade without regard to how much time he has spent on previous courses.*—Is not this an educational principle that should be adhered to from the elementary schools through the college? Yet our alarming conservatism compels us to establish a special type of school for its realization. A few years ago the meeting of the Department of Superintendence of the

National Education Association applauded such principles of education. However, the big majority went back to run the same old mill—grades, technical examination, 70 per cent passing work, promotion once or twice a year. This is no condemnation of the school authorities of this country. We all do similar things. It illustrates how difficult it is to bring our practice up to our convictions.

Nevertheless, the junior high school is supposed to keep a greater number of children in school, to recognize physiological and intellectual age rather than chronological age, to provide for special talents and exceptional development, to awaken and to stimulate achievement rather than to enlarge *fact-knowledge*. How can these things be accomplished without freedom of promotion and encouragement to go ahead?

3. *The junior high school must finally include much material not now in the grades or in the first year of the high school.*—Our present method of sending the child out into the world to earn his living, to achieve his destiny without adequate knowledge of the industrial life of the nation, is an educational blunder almost amounting to a crime. It is productive of crime. Such a course must be made a prominent part of the seventh and eighth-grade work. The child has a right to know all the various lines of his possible future realization. The qualifications, compensation, opportunity for promotion, physical and moral dangers, intellectual and social development, history of the occupation—all these are necessary facts which should be presented concerning every occupation for boys and girls.

Again, the manual and practical industrial work of these grades must be greatly increased. History must be largely biographical, inspirational, and optimistic—not technical *fact-knowledge*. Shorthand, typewriting, and simple bookkeeping should be possible for all who have any talent or inclination

along these lines. Practical science and modern languages must be introduced.

These and other modifications will be worked out as time goes on. Are you ready for these things? Do you believe in them? If you answer in the affirmative, remember that this means a radical modification of our present program. There is no use in offering these things and giving the child no opportunity to take them. You will probably find that some of your useless and unused knowledge of arithmetic and algebra, your long-cherished and detrimental technical grammar, and your over-thoroughness in *fact-knowledge* of history and geography must be eliminated or take a secondary place. Do not worry. We can spare all this and still live in comfort.

4. *Sound scientific vocational guidance shall be a part of every junior high school.*—About three million children under the age of fourteen annually make a raid on the industrial world for some means to make a living. They have never even asked whether they are personally better fitted for one thing than another, whether the choice is temporary or for life, whether they would be happier and better contented in one place than in another. They constitute an army of drifters, Micawbers, and many become unintentional offenders against society. Only a small percentage of them have been advised by teachers or parents as to their life-work. Few of these children have even the aid of sympathetic interest in their destiny. We sin against these children.

What do we mean by "scientific guidance?" First let us distinguish it from fortune-telling and phrenology. On the other hand, if we are warned that such studies as Hollingworth's *Vocational Psychology* indicate the impossibility of scientific guidance, we reply that thinking of the problem by teacher and student is far more scientific and better than blind procedure without thought. But the task is not so hopeless.

It will be accomplished with different degrees of thoroughness. Here is not the place to point out ways and means.

Suppose most children have about the same possibilities. We doubt it. Still they need knowledge about the world's industries, and so far as practicable some testing of their powers by actual experience. But above all do they need psychological sympathy and the psychological value of faith in themselves and faith that they have selected wisely. I have found no work on vocational guidance that adequately emphasizes this phase of the problem. Only this attitude of mind can produce contentment and permanency of occupation and develop the best in an individual.

Every junior high school should have an expert on vocational guidance. He should have deep knowledge of human nature and of our industrial life and be profoundly in sympathy with the struggles of the adolescent. To him should be referred all important cases of individual choice of studies. He should settle them, not as a dictator, but as a kind, sympathetic father.

5. *The future junior high school shall provide ample opportunity for industrial work and for practical commercial activities.*—This calls for considerable funds and for an adjustment to public enterprises. Both are possible and both will be of substantial gain to society. It is all right to spend fabulous sums and sacrifice human life to fight foreign enemies, but she would also realize that ignorance and incompetency are real enemies of society and that vast sums of money and energy are required to combat them. In no nation was the necessity ever so imperative as now during our period of readjustment. Woe unto our leaders if they cannot hear the rumblings of an industrial earthquake.

Junior high schools should be provided with industrial shops of various kinds, with gardens and farms where real



work can be accomplished by those who cannot be induced to achieve in intellectual lines. Training in various occupations for girls should be possible. Arrangements should be made with business firms by which girls and boys who have talent or so choose can spend a part of their time in the practical achievements of the business world. This must be included in any complete system of vocational guidance. These things will cost time, patience, and money. But remember that the helpless, the vagabond, the criminal, cost not only money but suffering of all kinds and human life. There is no rational excuse for neglect in education. The nation that forgets war and directs wisely the industrial and moral education of her people during the next fifty years will avoid internal rebellion and revolutions and will shine as the leader of nations.

6. *Departmental teaching is necessary to the highest efficiency in junior-high-school work.*—Extensive knowledge and special ability are both necessary to hold and inspire the child who is about to be born into the kingdom of industry, of science, of music, of literature, of art, and of moral conduct. We not only believe that departmental teaching furnishes an opportunity for better qualified teachers, but we also feel sure that the future will demand teachers of college training, of maturity, of specialized knowledge, of deeper professional wisdom concerning human nature and especially concerning adolescence. All the commandments of the junior high school will be continually broken so long as teachers and authorities parade their perverted ideas of human conduct as the true pedagogical and psychological knowledge. They must come to know, feel, realize—not by word of mouth, but in the depth of the soul—that all conduct is just what heredity and environment declare it shall be. In the old sense of social accusation there exists no “bad” boy, no criminal—we have only the sick, the unfortunate, the diseased. True knowledge of life compels

us to look upon all mental disorders in the same spirit in which the physician considers physical disease.

7. *Properly supervised study is desirable everywhere, but imperative in the junior high school.*—No phase of human education demands a higher pedagogical art than this. It is the supreme Socratic hour in the life of our teachers. I would rather make up my judgment of true teaching power during this hour than any other. Most teachers who fill this high function can readily be divided into two classes—those who degenerate into the antagonistic suspicious boss and those who go to the other extreme and do the work for the children. Under the first class no true mental efficiency is possible and positive immoral conduct is stimulated. Under the guidance of the second class the pupil is made weaker all the time, memory is substituted for thinking, originality is crucified, and the teacher soon has nervous prostration.

Here is needed that rare gift of the gods which enables one to teach without appearing to do so, to put self entirely in the background, to take pride in watching other minds develop, to leave the pupil feeling that he has accomplished it all, to inspire to self-confidence and achievement. It is that power by which Socrates transformed all Athens. Yet when he was condemned to death for corrupting the youth of Athens he was able to defy any man in Athens to say that he ever taught him anything. Each man knew that Socrates had asked him a few questions, but his convictions he claimed as his own growth and achievement. A new ability, spirit, and purpose must dominate our teachers of the junior high school if they are to supervise the study of minds in the most critical period of human existence.

8. *When the future junior high school is adequately established, the regular high school must be adjusted to this new shrine of the golden age, and not vice versa.*—We are well aware of the

radical nature of this statement. But who fears radical things if they are only right and just? For twenty years, even though a college teacher, I have fought the domination of colleges over the high school. The case stands essentially the same so far as the relation of these two grades of high schools is concerned.

The colleges once decided from a personal and academic viewpoint what students should know on coming to college. Then they told the high schools *what to teach and how*. The high schools almost forgot the 95 per cent who never enter college in the interest of the 5 per cent. Should our regular high schools be allowed to maintain some rigid requirements for admission, we should have a similar and disastrous domination. Practically every principle for which the junior high school should stand will more or less be carried out only inadequately and with no end of camouflage. There shall be no entering the high school. The junior-high-school student is already in the high school in the same sense that the Freshman is in college. All he need do is to go on and prove his ability by doing the work or such work as is best suited to his ends and needs. The dominant trend of all education must be to serve best the greatest number. The minority must adjust themselves to the needs of the majority or devise their own education without interference with the welfare of the majority.

9. *We must create and train a special class of teachers for the junior high school.*—They must differ from other teachers in special knowledge of children from twelve to eighteen or twenty. The demand is even greater than that upon the primary teacher concerning early child life. No teacher can efficiently supervise study until she knows how children of that age study and how they should study.

Again, each teacher should have a sound knowledge of vocational guidance and be filled with enthusiasm and ambition for the achievements of youth. No teacher should be allowed in the junior high school who is not dominated by an active sympathy for the adolescent child, who in most cases, like Dante, finds himself or herself within a forest dark. In the language of Rousseau: "Be humane, be humane. It is your highest duty to be humane: To everything not alien to mankind."

10. *The dominant aim of the junior high school must be to encourage, to inspire to some purpose in life.*—The imparting of knowledge and the completion of a course shall be secondary ends. One of the chief aims of knowledge shall be to create interest in the great problems of life. We must present knowledge that interest may remain and not order interest that knowledge may remain. There can be no higher aim of education for this period than that of creating the proper attitude toward the great problems of life and human conduct. The amount of technical knowledge which the child retains is no proper indication of this attitude. The teacher must be allowed adequate freedom to accomplish these ends. The *measuring mania* is the most conceivably dangerous spirit that can pervade the junior high school.

Who can judge the degree of friendship, of loyalty, of co-operation, of sympathetic helpfulness, of originality, of determination, of purpose to serve, of moral spirit, of religious sentiment, of patriotism, of aesthetic appreciation, of attitude toward home and friends, of tendencies to crime, of obedience to law and order, of appreciation of art, music, and literature—by any display, combination, or arrangement of facts put on paper. These are the eternal verities of life and always imply something far above knowledge about them.